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President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . . (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 36

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/52/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/52/581)

Letter from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/52/571)

The President: I first give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*interpretation from French*): It is a genuine pleasure for me once again to address the General Assembly in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and it is also an honour for me to open the annual debate on the agenda item entitled "Question of Palestine".

I should like first of all to congratulate you once again, Sir, on your well-deserved election to the presidency of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly and to recall that you were an active member of our own Committee. Your boundless energy, your diplomatic skills and your devotion to the objectives of the United Nations are well known and greatly appreciated by all. I am convinced that you will guide our work in the most productive manner.

Not so long ago, some delegations felt that the mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People had been made redundant by the positive evolution of the peace process and that the Committee and other United Nations bodies active on this issue should be phased out, together with the Secretariat units servicing them. I think that those delegations quickly changed their minds in the light of the impasse in the peace process.

While welcoming the achievements in the negotiations since September 1993 with the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and the subsequent developments, in particular the Interim Agreement of 1995, the Committee cautioned that these were but steps towards the full achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Because the situation on the ground remained fragile and littered with pitfalls, the Committee reminded the international community that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility on the question of Palestine until the question has been resolved in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international legitimacy.

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* Reissued for technical reasons.

As the organ established by the General Assembly to deal with the question of Palestine, the Committee has continued to endeavour to play an essential role during the transitional period envisaged by the accords and will do so until the desired solution had been reached. In the context of the international community's efforts to find a solution, we would have been the first to rejoice at positive developments in the peace process, a process that had aroused such high hopes the world over.

But today the Committee is deeply saddened and disconcerted by the increasing difficulties and obstacles that have made the peace process fragile. By resuming its policy of constructing settlements and confiscating land; by increasingly encroaching upon occupied East Jerusalem and denying residency rights to Palestinians born and living there; by carrying out prolonged and punishing blockades of the areas under Palestinian Authority control; by postponing withdrawal from much of the West Bank; by its indifferent acceptance of harassment by armed settlers against innocent, unarmed Arab civilians; by carrying out punitive expeditions and acts of intimidation against Palestinian populations; by forbidding Palestinian families to be reunited: in all these ways, the Israeli Government has created a situation of deepening despair and tension in the occupied Palestinian territory. The behaviour of the occupying Power has thus increasingly undermined the confidence and lowered the expectations brought about in 1993 by the peace process.

The Committee has repeatedly condemned acts of violence by extremists, which have resulted in tragic loss of life among innocent civilians on both sides. Such reprehensible acts are the work of the enemies of peace. They sow fear and mistrust and prevent progress towards the reconciliation that is essential to the achievement of a lasting, peaceful political solution between the parties.

The retaliatory actions taken by the Israeli Government against the entire Palestinian population can never be justified or accepted by the international community as necessary security measures. Indeed, by strangling the economy and impeding normal movement between Gaza and the West Bank, they compound feelings of insecurity and tension and cause regrettable delays in the peace process. They can only fuel further instability, violence and insecurity.

Over the past year, as Chairman of the Committee, I have repeatedly expressed these concerns to the Security Council, as well as to the General Assembly at its resumed fifty-first session and at its tenth emergency special session. I have urged these organs, and the internati community as a whole, to intensify their efforts initiatives to save and reinvigorate the peace process to ensure respect for the provisions of international in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, in occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem.

I have also actively participated on behalf o Committee in the frequent deliberations on Palestine by intergovernmental bodies, notably the Moveme Non-Aligned Countries, the Organization of the Isl Conference and the Organization of African Unity. T resolutions and decisions, as well as those of intergovernmental and United Nations bodies, testi their keen interest and deep concern with respect t disturbing situation in Palestine. They reflec determination to act collectively to break the dange impasse in which the peace process is trapped. community of peace-loving nations simply wishes thr its messages to make the parties understand that peace can bring security, and that only security preserve peace.

In carrying out its mandate, the Committee has done everything possible to make an effective constructive contribution through the programm seminars and meetings of non-governmental organiza organized under its auspices. Those meetings provided a forum for frank and useful discussion an the adoption of action-oriented strategies with participation of Governments, intergovernmental and governmental organizations, experts, leaders, em individuals and Palestinian and Israeli decision mak

We also attach particular importance to programme of studies and publications, and activities of the Secretariat's Division for Palest Rights, including the training programme for staff Palestinian Authority and the United Nations elect information system on the question of Palestine.

When he introduces the Committee report, I an that the Rapporteur will provide the necessary d about these various activities.

For my part, I would like to take this opportun express the Committee's gratitude and appreciatio the generous support of the Governments of Indo and of Jordan, which provided venues and faciliti the holding of an Asian seminar and non-governm organization symposium and for a seminar on assis to the Palestinian people respectively.

We are also deeply grateful to the Belgian Government for offering facilities for a conference next February to be organized in cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, and to the Chilean Government for having agreed to the holding of the next Latin American and Caribbean seminar and non-governmental organization symposium.

The General Assembly is aware that the Republic of South Africa has requested to become a full member of the Committee and that Namibia will soon do the same. We try to encourage greater participation by all States in the Committee's activities, and other Governments have expressed an interest. We also note with appreciation the increasingly positive votes on many resolutions relating to the question of Palestine, as seen in the overwhelming majorities in favour of the resolutions adopted at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. This growing support sends a clear message and is a source of hope and reassurance, encouraging all the members of the Committee to intensify our efforts even further in the coming year.

I believe that the events of the past year have shown, without the shadow of a doubt, the great dangers of the policies of expansion and exclusion pursued by the present Israeli leadership. These policies run directly counter to the historical trend towards the resolution of conflicts in the world through dialogue and cooperation. Confidence-building measures and negotiation that should be at the basis of the dynamic of the peace process.

By seeking to impose an unjust peace denying the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people, these policies imperil the achievements of peace and the fragile network of economic, political and social relationships that was beginning to be established in Palestine. A rare historical opportunity is being squandered, with no other viable solution being proposed.

It is time, today more than ever before, to increase initiatives in order to save the peace process and spare the peoples of the region the spectre of war and acts of violence.

We earnestly hope that this debate, like the recent debate at the tenth emergency special session, will show the way towards peace by once again reminding the Israeli leaders of their country's obligations as a State party to the Fourth Geneva Convention and as a Member State of the United Nations. We must also reaffirm the position clearly adopted by the entire international community in favour of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and of a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which remains at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In order to achieve this just and lasting settlement, rooted in international legitimacy, the two parties must make an enormous effort and understand that only peace, mutual confidence and coexistence, with respect for the rights and dignity of all, can put an end to all the bloodshed, to so much sustained hatred and pointless destruction.

The President: I now call on the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Saliba (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur, having assumed my new functions earlier this year, to present to the General Assembly for the first time the annual report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

During the past year the Committee continued to do its utmost to implement the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The report covers the new developments concerning the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee since last year's report.

The introduction to the report is contained in chapter I, which indicates briefly the Committee's objectives and concerns in the light of the evolving situation. Chapters II and III are procedural; they summarize the respective mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information (DPI) and give information on the Committee's organization of work.

Chapter IV covers developments in the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee in the course of the year. While noting some progress with regard to the peace process early in the year, particularly the signing of the Protocol on Hebron and the release of some Palestinian detainees, the Committee was increasingly concerned at the ongoing deterioration of the situation and the intensification of violence and tension on the ground. The Committee expressed its great concern that the Israeli-Palestinian

negotiations faced serious setbacks due to the position of the Government of Israel on the various aspects of the peace process. In particular, the Committee was alarmed by the position of the Government of Israel on the question of Jerusalem, especially the establishment of a new settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim, the growing threat to Palestinian residency rights in Jerusalem, the continued expansion of settlements in general, confiscation of Arab land, demolition of Palestinian houses and the prolonged closure of the Palestinian territory.

The main body of the report is in chapter V, which gives an account of the action taken by the Committee in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 51/23 and 51/24. The Committee Chairman participated in international efforts in opposition to the new Israeli settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim by drawing the attention of the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council thereto and by actively representing the Committee in all the relevant meetings of the Security Council, the resumed fifty-first session and the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly.

The Committee also sought to remind the international community of the fact that the occupation still continues, by organizing a special commemorative meeting on the thirtieth anniversary of the war of June 1967. The Chairman also raised the Committee's concerns in the relevant international ministerial meetings and summits at which he represented the Committee. The report also notes similar concerns expressed by various United Nations and intergovernmental bodies in their resolutions and communiqués relating to the question of Palestine, the list of which is included in the report.

Chapter V also provides information on the Committee's efforts to make its work more relevant and useful in the light of the new developments on the ground, and to involve additional countries in its work. The Committee continued to endeavour to sharpen the focus of its seminars and non-governmental organization meetings in the various regions, to make them more action-oriented, and to reach out to broader non-governmental organization constituencies. The meetings held during 1997 included the annual meeting of consultations with the representatives of non-governmental organization coordinating committees, held in New York in February; an Asian seminar and non-governmental organization symposium on the question of Palestine, held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in May; the annual seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people, held in Amman, Jordan, also in May; the annual North American Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations, held in New York in June; and the annual European Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations and the International Meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations, held in Geneva in August. I would like to take this opportunity to join our Chairman in expressing our profound thanks to the Governments of Indonesia and Jordan for providing the venue and facilitating the holding of these important events.

The chapter also provides information on the activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights in the field of research and publications, including the recent issuance of a study on the status of Jerusalem, as well as on the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL). It also provides information on a training programme on the workings of the United Nations for staff of the Palestinian Authority, initiated in 1996, which is being continued this year. Finally, the chapter describes the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which took place in New York as well as at the United Nations Offices in Geneva, Vienna and other cities.

Chapter VI covers the work of the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 51/25, including the publications and audio-visual activities of the Department, and other activities carried out by the Department. The seventh and last chapter contains the recommendations of the Committee to the General Assembly. Noting the various anniversaries of the history of dispossession of the Palestinian people commemorated in 1997, the Committee urges the international community to redouble its efforts in support of their inalienable rights, which are the key to a just and lasting peace. The Committee also considers it essential for the international community to intensify its efforts in support of the historic process of reconciliation between the two sides and for the effective implementation of the agreements reached since 1993.

At the same time, the Committee expresses its greatest concern at the growing stalemate in the peace process and the exacerbation of tension and violence on the ground. It calls for an end to the prolonged closure of the occupied territory and other forms of collective punishment, in the interest of restoring mutual confidence and promoting peace.

The Committee expresses special concern regarding actions taken by Israel in occupied East Jerusalem and the intensification of settlement construction, as they

jeopardize prospects for a just peace and for the achievement of the Palestinian right to self-determination. With regard particularly to Israel's decision to build a new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim in spite of international opposition, the Committee expresses its full support for the recommendations made by the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session, and for the convening of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Committee also states that it will remain engaged in the follow-up to these recommendations in order to promote the necessary action.

The Committee also calls for additional efforts by the international community to restore momentum to the Middle East peace process and reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached, based on established and accepted principles. The Committee reiterates its view that its own role will continue to be useful and necessary until a satisfactory final settlement is reached and invites the General Assembly once again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

Finally, the Committee expresses its great appreciation to those States which have supported its work; it stresses the continued importance and usefulness of its programme of seminars and non-governmental organization meetings; and it calls for the greatest possible participation of States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in the meetings organized under its auspices, as such meetings provide useful and unique forums for discussion of all relevant issues and for the development of joint activities by all those concerned.

The Committee also emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat as a focal point for collection and dissemination of information on all issues related to the question of Palestine and requests it to continue its programme of publications and studies and to develop further the United Nations computer-based information system on the question of Palestine. It also requests the continuation of the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority.

Finally, the Committee expresses its intention to continue to strive to achieve maximum effectiveness in the implementation of its mandate and to adjust its work programme in the light of developments, in order to continue to contribute, to the extent possible, to the realization of the common United Nations objective of achieving a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

I trust that this report will be of assistance to the General Assembly in facilitating its deliberations on this important issue.

The President: The next speaker is the Head of the Observer delegation of Palestine, Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988, I give him the floor.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me pleasure to speak today, and to begin my statement by greeting and congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly in these turbulent international circumstances. We trust in your wisdom to ensure the success of this session. We would also like to express our appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Razali Ismail, who presided over the previous session with success. I should also like to express our appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to its Chairman, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, who continues to work tirelessly on the question of Palestine.

We are returning here to the General Assembly to examine the question of Palestine after the shock that international public opinion underwent as a result of the impasse in the peace process, especially when Mr. Netanyahu became Prime Minister of Israel last year following the success of the Likud coalition in the recent elections. In those elections, the extremist right in Israel was victorious. Everyone knows that the extremist and fundamentalist parties have bolstered their position. They won more parliamentary seats, resulting in an imbalance in the composition of the Israeli Knesset. This is a proof that the current of extremism inside Israeli society is continuing to enjoy a majority, which ensures its overwhelming success.

In the wake of the assassination of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, it was expected that the parties and groups that advocate peace would be successful. But the situation has been reversed, with the fall of the Labour party and the triumph of *Likud* and its extremist allies.

Moreover, Israeli extremism has been manifested in the creation of pretexts and facts on the ground which concretely reaffirm the Israeli Government's rejection of

the concluded agreements and its reneging on previous obligations. It has therefore called for re-examination of the agreement concerning redeployment from Hebron which was signed by the previous Labour Government. That redeployment was supposed to have been completed before the Israeli elections in order for redeployment to be resumed from the rural areas, labelled B, and the departure of the Israeli army from over 600 Palestinian villages. But Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, insisted on discussing the departure from Hebron thus wasting seven months and, in the end, winning 20 per cent of the territory of the city following its partition, keeping for Israel the historical, commercial and industrial parts of the city, even though the town of Hebron is 100 per cent Palestinian.

Regrettably, instead of the United States playing a positive role to prevent a recurrence of the cycle of violence and to reduce the tension, Mr. Christopher, the former United States Secretary of State, sent a letter to Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, in which he acknowledged the right of freedom to redeploy the Israeli army, to set a date for that redeployment and its geographical extent and to determine the degree to which more powers would be transferred to the Palestinian National Authority. All of that was without negotiations with the Palestinians, thus contravening the provisions of the accord that called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces and their redeployment from 30 per cent of the territory of the Palestinian West Bank immediately following the implementation of the Hebron Protocol.

Despite the agreement reached between the Palestinian and Israeli sides on an accord on the city, the Government of Israel immediately started the construction of settlements in Jebel Abu Ghneim in the occupied area of Jerusalem/Bethlehem while it was supposed to start withdrawing its forces from the rural areas instead of starting to confiscate Palestinian lands and building settlements on them.

With regard to Jerusalem, Israel continues its violations. It confiscates Palestinian homes and other buildings, especially inside the walled Holy City of Jerusalem. Israel has developed a blueprint, in a very short period of time, to confiscate 18 Palestinian homes in order to house 18 Jewish families, thus challenging the international community, the spiritual dimension of all faiths and the principles of coexistence among all these faiths. This is in addition to its refusal to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 465 (1980), 476 (1980), 478 (1980) and 1073 (1996).

Since the signing of the Hebron Protocol and up to the present, negotiations and direct and indirect contacts, at times through concerned intermediaries, have been conducted. In addition, the United States, as a sponsor of the peace talks, is undertaking timid efforts to convince the Israeli Government to fulfil its obligations, to no avail.

When Ms. Albright became Secretary of State she made little effort in that direction. As she put it, she was waiting for the two parties, the Palestinian and the Israeli sides, to reach an understanding, in order for her to visit the region to give the peace march a push and put it back on track.

When the state of tension heightened in the region with a new cycle of violence, Ms. Albright came to the region and convened meetings with all the parties concerned in the peace process, whether Arab or Israeli.

She herself witnessed first hand human and material manifestations which condemn Israeli conduct and prove the necessity of intensifying efforts to prevent the deterioration of the situation in the region. Ms. Albright herself witnessed the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation and under the strict Israeli blockade.

When she returned to Washington, she addressed an invitation to the Palestinians and to the Israelis to meet at a negotiating session in New York in the last third of September 1997. After the meeting she outlined four points at a press conference. She emphasized the security questions and the need to combat terrorism and its infrastructure. But she failed to make a clear reference to the need to put an end to settlement activity and the construction of settlements. At the same time, she referred to the redeployment of the Israeli army, but linked that withdrawal to conditions that would, in point of fact, lead to the non-fulfilment of such a withdrawal.

However, Ms. Albright knows full well that these two points are the underlying causes of the current tension and the resurgence of the cycle of violence in the region.

As is known, the Israeli Government has committed provocative acts, such as the opening of the tunnel adjacent to the holy Moslem shrine, the Haram al-Sharif, in Jerusalem which resulted in violent clashes in September of last year leaving 83 Palestinian martyrs and more than 1,300 other casualties.

At that time, the Security Council adopted resolution 1073 (1996), in which it condemned these provocative acts. At that meeting of the Security Council, which took place during the session of the General Assembly, the Foreign Ministers of the permanent members of the Security Council, along with other Ministers of the Member States of the United Nations took part in the Security Council's discussions.

America's position remains hesitant. It is not playing its role effectively as a sponsor of the peace process. The parties concerned have accepted the initiative put forward by a former American President, Mr. George Bush, in 1991, and the Madrid Peace Conference was convened on the basis of the land-for-peace formula and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied Arab and Palestinian territories that were occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which relates to withdrawal from Southern Lebanon.

But, as usual, the Israeli Government turned its back completely on the resolutions of the Security Council and on all the other accords and obligations. The United States was supposed to play a vital and active role in reviving the peace process and bringing pressure to bear on Israel, utilizing its special means. That gave Israel valuable time in which to confiscate more Palestinian land, build more Israeli settlements, tighten its blockade against the Palestinian people, economically and militarily, and paralyse the movement of the Palestinian citizens.

The Israeli blockade prevents Palestinian citizens from moving, hampers the transfer of goods and the movement of the populace within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and between them, prevents entry and departure to and from the Palestinian territories, erects checkpoints, and isolates towns and villages, preventing the population from moving between them. Such measures have led to a severe shortage of primary materials and foodstuffs, resulting in economic paralysis. They have also raised the rate of unemployment to about 65 per cent and had a serious adverse impact on national and foreign investments, which have declined substantially.

Moreover, the Israeli Government has withheld tax revenues which it collected from Palestinian citizens, and which are due to the Palestinian National Authority. This was substantiated by the report of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, of 26 June 1997 (A/ES-10/6).

At the same time, Israel has backtracked from the agreement that was reached on the return of displaced Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip who were expelled as a result of the aggression committed in 1967. The total number of these displaced persons is no less than 750,000. That commitment should have been implemented, in pursuance of Security Council resolution 237 (1967), as well as under the 1993 Declaration of Principles. Israel also continues to deny to those refugees who were ejected from Palestine in 1948 their right to return to their homes under General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

Here it should be kept in mind that Israel was born in the United Nations under General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947 and did not emerge through history. That partition resolution was a birth certificate not only for Israel but also for an independent Arab State of Palestine. In this context, it is very bizarre that today we hear the current Israeli Prime Minister threatening to annex Palestinian territory if the Palestine Organization were to declare an independent State of Palestine.

Four years have elapsed, and Israel continues to prevaricate and is engaged in an exercise of subterfuge and circumvention in its interpretation of the provisions of the accords and agreements that were reached. It continues to Judaize more and more Palestinian territory through the confiscation of Palestinian land, the building of more and more settlements and the tightening of the siege imposed upon the Palestinian Authority, in order to cripple its effectiveness and obstruct the path of the Palestinian people with a view to denying them their right to exercise sovereignty over their national territory and resources.

Israel denies the Palestinian people their national rights, and is engaged in intensive efforts to perpetuate the settler presence on Palestinian territories and increase the number of settlements and settlers constantly. The objective is to make the Israeli settlements not only difficult, but impossible, to dismantle in accordance with Security Council resolution 465 (1980), which, by a unanimous vote, called for their dismantlement. Successive Security Council resolutions have emphasized that Israeli policies and practices of building settlements are illegal and are serious impediments to the achievement of a comprehensive and lasting peace. Furthermore, they contravene the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 as well as international law. The Security Council went even further than that. Resolution 465 (1980), unanimously adopted by the Security Council

in March 1980, called on Israel to dismantle the Israeli settlements that were in existence at that time.

Since then we have noted a regression in the position of the United States of America. The United States took no action beyond pro forma protests regarding Israel's settlement activity. Indeed, on certain occasions, the United States allowed Israel to complete construction activities in some settlements, even though perceiving in those settlements an obstacle to peaceful settlement and a factor that complicates the peace process.

We have noticed recently that the United States, regrettably, has started to look at the issue from an Israeli perspective. It has stated that the United Nations no longer has a role to play in the questions pertaining to a peaceful, political settlement such as of Israeli settlements, Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugees and Palestinian sovereignty.

Most recently, the United States exercised its veto twice in one week in the Security Council, in order to prevent the Council from undertaking its responsibilities. That action by the United States led to the convening of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, the first in 15 years. I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to those Member States which supported the convening of that special session and voted in favour of the important resolutions it adopted. We continue to hope that those resolutions will be implemented.

By backtracking on the accords that have been reached, Israel deliberately seeks to tighten its control and hegemony over Palestinian land and resources in order to continue its settlement activity without hindrance. Israel has built bypass roads linking the Israeli settlements, of which there are now 183 in the West Bank. These bypass roads do not run through Palestinian villages, but around them. Indeed, they are a siege against those Palestinian villages and towns. Israel uses those bypass roads for its military and security purposes, thereby managing to isolate the Palestinian villages and towns and cut them off from each other, creating for them severe economic, social and security problems.

This is an accurate account of developments in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating track. As to the other tracks, namely the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese, these are still frozen. But more serious than that, the Israeli Government is now scheming against those two sister countries. The Israeli army is committing repeated acts of aggression against sister Lebanon, creating scores of civilian casualties and destroying the country's vital centres. Yet Israel claims that it is prepared to withdraw first from southern Lebanon and then expresses its wish for peace while continuing to commit acts of aggression against Lebanon.

Facts and events show that the peace process in the Middle East is at an impasse owing to the behaviour of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his political group and the provocative measures taken by that country. As a sponsor of the peace process, the United States should have played its role in reviving the peace process. The situation today requires a reaffirmation by the United Nations of its permanent responsibilities with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security and in ensuring the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council calling for Israel to withdraw from all territories occupied since 1967 so that the cycle of violence and tension will not recur, particularly given the disappearance of confidence between the parties to the conflict.

The United Nations has previously taken practical measures to address numerous international problems. Is it not now time for the Organization to take concrete steps to preserve the peace, to halt the deterioration of the security situation in the region, and to preserve and revitalize the peace process on the basis of the principles set forth at the Madrid Conference? Israel's persistence in its approach makes it impossible to achieve success in political negotiations or to reach a solution which would keep peace and security in the region. The perpetuation of Israeli occupation and its continuation of settlement activities inevitably doom the peace process, which demands first and foremost Israel's withdrawal from all Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. Israel must also dismantle the Israeli settlements. Unless those things are accomplished, the entire region of the Middle East will continue to be vulnerable to explosions and successive wars.

There is no doubt that the decision by the Arab States to suspend the normalization of relations with Israel and to stay away from meetings of the various multilateral commissions, as well as the absence of most of the Arab States from the recent economic forum in Doha, Qatar, are definite evidence of the loss of confidence in the success of the peace process.

The requirements of peace and security call for all Member States to respect Security Council resolutions

and to commit to their implementation so that the United Nations may remain an effective mechanism for addressing regional problems by peaceful means. However, we see that some Powers are acting according to a double standard and that they exempt Israel from compliance with United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions, even though that country is the party that threatens peace and security in the region thanks to its possession of weapons of mass destruction and its refusal to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons while continuing to impede the peace process, freezing it.

The continued sanctions against Iraq, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the Sudan have begun to raise questions in world public opinion about the duration of such sanctions. Is it not time that such unjust sanctions be lifted and that conditions be created that could bring relief to the Iraqi population, so that Iraqi children might have the basic life requirements of foodstuffs and medical supplies and the country have a chance to return to international life as an effective member of the world community?

We look forward to the full implementation of United Nations resolutions, especially those adopted at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, including those regarding the convening of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 in order to examine the necessary coercive measures to be adopted to ensure respect for that Convention and the implementation of its provisions in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 by Israel, including Jerusalem.

We also hope that at this session the General Assembly will endorse the full participation of Palestine in the proceedings of the United Nations and ensure that participation by Israel in those proceedings is in line with the provisions of international law and those of the Fourth Geneva Convention with regard to the Arab territories occupied since 1967, especially with regard to Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan.

We stand for comprehensive and lasting peace based on the principles of the Madrid Conference and in keeping with the provisions of United Nations Charter and its resolutions. However, we reject surrender to faits accomplis or the recognition of illegal de facto conditions created on the ground by Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories. We shall resist that injustice and aggression on the basis of our right to existence and to self-determination as a nation that has lived on that land for thousands of years and established there its glorious civilization.

Mr. Wolzfeld (Luxembourg) (*interpretation from French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, namely Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the associated country Cyprus, as well as Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

The Middle East Peace Process has reached a worrying impasse. The conclusion in January 1997 of the protocol concerning the redeployment in Hebron kindled hopes of a renewal of trust between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government and hopes that this renewed trust would create a climate conducive to further fruitful negotiations. The construction of a new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim/Har Homa unfortunately put an end to this encouraging perspective.

Terrorist acts, for which there can be no justification, have further compromised the trust between the parties and aggravated the crisis in the peace talks.

The European Union calls on the parties to resume political dialogue, to continue the negotiations in order to make progress on the implementation of the Interim Agreement and the Hebron protocol, and to resume the final status talks. It is therefore vital to refrain from any unilateral action that would prejudge questions relating to the final status and to restore on a lasting basis full and complete cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

The European Union strongly reaffirms that peace in the Middle East is a question of fundamental importance to it. It will continue its efforts to support the peace process through the relations of friendship and trust that it enjoys with the various parties by intensifying its commitment at the diplomatic level, including through its special envoy for the Middle East peace process, Ambassador Moratinos, as well as its economic commitment in the region.

Thus, the President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, Mr. Jacques F. Poos, visited the region from 11 to 14 November 1997. On this occasion, he reaffirmed to his Middle East partners the Union's commitment to working to assist the current peace efforts.

In this context, the President of the Council argued in favour of implementing confidence-building measures, such as the opening of the Gaza airport, the construction of a port and free passage for Palestinians between Gaza and the West Bank. He also insisted on the need to finalize a code of good conduct between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. He also repeated the European Union's view that, important as such confidence-building measures may be, they should not obscure the real priorities of the peace process, namely the implementation of the agreed peace accords concerning the withdrawal of Israeli troops, as well as the fight against terrorism and the opening of the final status talks.

In addition to these political efforts, the European Union has undertaken to provide substantial funding to promote the economic and social development of the Palestinian population. Thus, the Union remains the major donor of funds to the Palestinians. We have pledged ECU 500 million in aid for the period from 1994 to 1999. In 1997, a package of ECU 50 million was specifically allocated to education and the media and to technical assistance to the municipalities and the Palestinian Legislative Council. Finally, ECU 4 million have been made available to the Palestinian Authority in order to meet its immediate needs on account of Israel's withholding of fiscal revenues due.

There is no alternative to the peace process launched in Madrid and Oslo. The European Union calls on the peoples and Governments of the region to regain the spirit of mutual trust that kindled the hope of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, which would make it possible to resolve the question of Palestine and of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): At the outset let me announce that Bangladesh has become one of the sponsors of three draft resolutions, A/52/L.49, L.50 and L.51, that are now being circulated on this question.

Bangladesh is deeply appreciative of the substantive report on the question of Palestine submitted by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in document A/52/35. We commend the good work being done by this 23-member Committee as the organ of the General Assembly dealing with the question of Palestine. Bangladesh has had the honour of attending its sessions as an observer on a regular basis. We also pay tribute to Ambassador Ibra Ka of Senegal for his leadership as the Chairman of the Committee. The report reminds the international community how much work still needs to be done — notwithstanding so many resolutions, United Nations sessions and international conferences — to bring about a just resolution of the Palestine question and, thus, achieve a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The year 1997 marks three decades that Israel has occupied the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem and other Arab territories. It is also the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the intifadah, the Palestinian uprising that helped create the conditions for the peace process. Bangladesh therefore underscores the need to redouble this year our efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East by establishing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Like the Palestinian Rights Committee, we are extremely concerned and anguished that the hopes ushered in by initial positive developments in the region are not being realized, leaving the peace process increasingly in jeopardy and, at the same time, causing an alarming exacerbation of tension and violence on the ground.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is a matter of grave concern to the international community. It is indeed unfortunate that the Israeli authorities have — in defiance of all United Nations resolutions and in flagrant violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people — continued to pursue repressive policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. The United Nations has stressed the need to preserve the territorial integrity of all the occupied Palestinian territory and to guarantee the freedom of movement of persons and goods in the territory, including the removal of restrictions on movement into and from East Jerusalem, and the freedom of movement to and from the outside world. The United Nations has also demanded immediate and full cessation of construction in Jebel Abu Ghneim and of all other Israeli settlement activities, as well as of all illegal measures and actions in Jerusalem.

Regrettably, Israel has not heeded this demand and has, in fact, continued with such illegal measures and actions, including violating the territorial integrity of the Palestinian territory and imposing restrictions on the freedom of movement of persons and goods. Bangladesh believes that the harsh economic measures imposed against the occupied Palestinian territory, including the prolonged blockade, are a form of collective punishment, in contravention of international law and the agreements reached.

Bangladesh, which is committed by its Constitution to supporting oppressed peoples throughout the world, has consistently expressed strong solidarity with our Palestinian brethren, always and everywhere, in particular at the United Nations and in all major international forums. We reiterate our strong condemnation of Israel's policy of systematic violation of international humanitarian law, as well as fundamental freedoms and basic human rights, in the occupied territories. In her message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People this year on 29 November, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that:

> "We reiterate our appeal for ensuring the applicability of the relevant Geneva Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories so that the dignity of the Palestinian people is no more assailed, so that no Palestinian is subjected to humiliation or degrading treatment, so that they receive the protection provided by international law."

My delegation would like to stress the necessity for commitment to the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process, and the need for immediate and scrupulous implementation of the agreement reached between the parties, including the redeployment of Israeli forces from the West Bank and the commencement of negotiations on the final settlement. Bangladesh joins others in calling for a reinjection of momentum into the stalled Middle East peace process. We call upon the concerned parties, the sponsors of the peace process and other international parties, as well as the entire international community, to undertake all the necessary efforts and initiatives to bring the peace process back on track and to ensure its continuity and success.

Bangladesh believes that, in the interest of restoring mutual confidence and promoting peace, it is absolutely necessary to end all illegal measures and actions by Israel. It cannot be overemphasized that the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict will constitute a significant contribution to strengthening international peace, security and progress. We urge all concerned to ensure that the peace accords are complied with fully and negotiations with the Palestinian Authority pursued in a congenial atmosphere. The peace process can be effectively advanced by the withdrawal of all troops from the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, stopping settlement in those areas with immediate effect, and allowing the Palestinian diaspora to return with full dignity to its homeland. It is also essential that the international community be forthcoming in fulfilling its commitment to supporting the peace process by extending economic, financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian people during the interim period.

My delegation strongly supports the call voiced by delegations for conferring upon Palestine the same rights and privileges of participation, except voting rights and candidatures, as those conferred upon States Members of the United Nations in the sessions and work of the General Assembly and in the international conferences convened under the auspices of the Assembly or other organs of the United Nations. We also strongly support the Palestinian rights Committee's view that the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat continues to make a useful and constructive contribution to the dissemination of information on all issues pertaining to the question of Palestine. We request the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources to enable it to perform its task and to cover adequately the various aspects of the question of Palestine, including the project for the training of staff of the Palestinian Authority.

In conclusion, Bangladesh reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. We believe that the active involvement of the United Nations is essential for the successful outcome of the peace efforts.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): The General Assembly is considering the question of Palestine at a critical moment in the history of the Middle East region, for the peace process which began in 1991, generating great hopes and expectations that a durable and lasting peace was within reach — especially one that included the exercise by the Palestinian people of its right to self-determination and independence — has been jeopardized. The region now stands dangerously close to becoming embroiled in tension and turmoil. The continuing ordeal of the Palestinians, as well as the deteriorating situation on the ground, are well chronicled in the report to the Assembly of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Allow me at this juncture to commend Ambassador Ibra Ka, whose dedicated service and dynamic stewardship of the Committee — of which Indonesia takes pride in having been a member since its inception — has helped to mobilize global opinion at this

critical stage of the peace process to the just cause of the Palestinian people.

The past year has been marked by increasing tension, which has been exacerbated by a stalemate in the peace process. The tragedies of the past risk being reenacted and the spirit of peace and harmony appears to be fading into the distance. We had earnestly hoped, along with the rest of the international community, that the peace accords that were so scrupulously and painstakingly negotiated would be implemented in good faith. Instead, we are confronted with a retreat from those very fundamental principles of the peace process, a defiant refusal by the Government of Israel to honour its legal obligations and commitments, and an audacious attempt unilaterally to abrogate the peace accords. These actions are contrary to all acceptable norms of international relations and an affront to the principles of justice.

Meanwhile, it is appalling that the Israeli authorities have embarked on perpetuating policies which can only have untold and disastrous consequences. Foremost of these is the expansion of settlements in and around Jebel Abu Ghneim, compounded by other untenable actions, such as the demolition of properties, closures, and the denial of residency rights to Palestinians in Jerusalem by the confiscation of documents. These acts have not only dealt a serious blow to the peace process, but have inflamed passions in the occupied territories and throughout the world.

It was in this overriding context that the international community, through the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which has been convened three times over the past year, expressed its unequivocal condemnation of Israel's settlement activities in Jebel Abu Ghneim, to the south of occupied East Jerusalem, as a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, international law and other relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Clearly, the Government of Israel cannot hide under the flimsy pretext of security considerations to justify its untenable actions against an entire people, nor can it rationalize its acts of intimidation and practices of repression and persecution. Such ill-conceived policies do not bode well for a stable peace in the region and entail even greater ramifications for the world at large. It would mark a return to aggression and be an assault on peace, for peace and security are intertwined and cannot exist on the basis of the usurpation of the basic rights of the Palestinian people. Therefore, the Government of Israel must be urged to implement its legal commitments with consistency and fairness. Only in this way can a climate of mutual trust and confidence be fostered, enabling the parties to resume negotiations on the remaining issues and thereby paving the way to genuine peace.

It is self-evident that a difficult road lies ahead in surmounting the decades of occupation and injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people, which have gravely undermined the socio-economic fabric of their society. In this regard, we believe that the United Nations and its agencies have a central role to play in alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people, and also in assisting in carrying out the formidable and challenging tasks of nation-building. We are therefore gratified by the appointment of Ambassador Chinmaya R. Gharekhan as the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, to serve as the focal point of the efforts of the Organization, as well as to maintain contact with the donor community and other non-governmental organizations in this field.

It was five decades ago that the General Assembly was seized of the question of Palestine with the adoption of resolution 181 (II). Throughout these long and arduous years, more time and effort has been expended on the question of Palestine than on any other international problem. Yet this question remains on our agenda. Without a shadow of a doubt, a durable and just solution to this intractable problem can be attained only if the Palestinian people are allowed to regain their legitimate national rights — including the right to return to their own independent homeland — based on the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

For its part, Indonesia will continue to give unswerving support to the valiant Palestinian people. It has consistently maintained the Palestinian national cause as a matter consonant with the fundamental principles and purposes enshrined in its own Constitution. It was therefore most gratifying for Indonesia to host the Asian seminar and non-governmental organization symposium on achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, held in Jakarta from 4 to 7 May 1997, which provided an appropriate forum to explore all avenues which would lead to a comprehensive and just settlement to the question of Palestine.

Standing at the threshold of the next century, we fervently hope that peace will be permanently anchored in the Middle East and that a displaced people who have

known nothing but frustration and bitterness, deprivation and denial, will finally emerge triumphant.

Mr. Diatta (Niger) (*interpretation from French*): First of all, I would like to express, on behalf of my delegation, my sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the clear and comprehensive report on the question of Palestine which each has submitted.

In the light of events during the past year, we can affirm that progress on this question has not met the expectations of the international community. In fact, the peace process on which it had placed so much hope has been at an impasse for several months now.

The serious setback sustained by the peace process is undoubtedly the result of the unilateral decision of the Israeli Government to build a new settlement in occupied East Jerusalem, in flagrant violation of agreements concluded. This unfortunate decision has plunged the entire region of the Middle East — and in particular the occupied Palestinian territory — into an alarming political situation characterized in particular by an escalation of violence on the ground and, above all, by numerous losses of human lives, both Palestinian and Israeli.

The prevailing situation of confrontation is all the more regrettable since the bilateral negotiations which were begun in order to implement the agreements were at a critical phase regarding the final status of the Palestinian territories.

Such an atmosphere, along with the fact that the Security Council has twice been prevented from taking the necessary measures to deal with this issue, led the international community — represented by the General Assembly — to hold an emergency special session, in accordance with its responsibilities under the Charter. However, despite the adoption by an overwhelming majority of Member States, of resolutions ES-10/2 and ES-10/3, which, among other things, demanded that Israel renounce all illegal measures and activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, the political situation and security have continued to deteriorate as a result of the Israeli Government's non-compliance with the provisions of those resolutions and the Oslo agreements.

This is why public opinion throughout the world has been perturbed by the Israeli policy and practices in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, policy and practices which threaten to plunge the Middle East region into a new period of conflict unless we take care to prevent it. Even in Israel, more and more voices are raised to demand the relaunching of the peace process and to express their disappointment, even frustration, concerning the illegal measures taken by Israel.

The popular rally organized in Tel Aviv last 8 November, at the very site of the assassination of one of the great architects of the peace process, former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, is the most striking illustration of this. Moreover, this general mobilization for peace was unanimously acknowledged to have been the greatest gathering in the history of Israel.

My delegation therefore shares the point of view expressed by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People when it affirms in its report that it is

> "essential for the international community to intensify its efforts in support of the historic process of reconciliation between the two sides and for the effective implementation of the agreements reached and for the resumption of all aspects of the negotiations on the agreed basis." (A/52/35, para. 125)

Our General Assembly must shoulder this task, as it has been given a permanent responsibility regarding the question of Palestine until it is settled in all its aspects.

My delegation calls on the parties concerned to re-establish an ongoing dialogue and resume their cooperation to change the current alarming situation and make progress in the effective implementation of the agreements reached, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace.

Indeed, as we know, peace is an endeavour based on mutual trust and requiring behaviour which will lead to an atmosphere of calm. Therefore, my delegation particularly urges the Israeli Government to once and for all renounce all the illegal measures it has taken, since these are endangering the Middle East peace process. Only in this way can a new opportunity be given to the peace that the international community so ardently hopes to see.

Before concluding my statement, I should like to reiterate to the Assembly the conviction of the people and Government of Niger that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East hinges on the necessary exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including their right to establish an independent State, and on scrupulous respect of the relevant United Nations resolutions as well as of the obligations enshrined in agreements already concluded.

Niger will spare no effort to ensure the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The President: Before I give the floor to the next speaker, I should like to inform members that in connection with the item under consideration, five draft resolutions, contained in documents A/52/L.49 through A/52/L.53, have just been distributed to delegations in the Hall.

Mr. Qin Huasun (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): In the six years that have elapsed since the Madrid Conference, the Middle East peace process has made important headway thanks to the joint efforts of Palestine and Israel and the extensive support of the international community. Earlier this year, Palestine and Israel reached an agreement on the question of Hebron, which advanced the self-rule process of the Palestinian people another step forward. However, the insistence of the Israeli side on building Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem has led to serious difficulties in the Middle East peace process, to the suspension of Palestine-Israel peace talks and to the escalation of terrorist violence. The international community is deeply concerned and disturbed by this situation.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East question. The suffering of the Palestinian people over the past 50 years has elicited broad concern and sympathy from the international community. Only a comprehensive, just and reasonable settlement of the question of Palestine and the restoration to the Palestinian people of all their legitimate national rights, including the right to establish an independent State, can bring about genuine and lasting peace in the region.

The history of the Middle East over the past decades, and particularly the developments in the Middle East peace process in recent years, have proved that the countries in the region can enjoy real security and promote regional economic cooperation and common development only when there is a comprehensive and just peace. To this end, we call on Israel to stop building Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, and we hope that all parties concerned will continue to take a flexible and pragmatic approach, strictly observe and implement the agreements already reached, fulfil in real earnest their obligations, remove obstructions and resume talks at an early date on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace, so as to push the peace process forward.

For historical reasons and as a result of the continued closure and sanctions, people's lives and the economy in the areas of Palestinian self-rule have faced many difficulties since the start of that self-rule; this has seriously hindered development. The Israeli side should refrain from enforcing closure in the self-rule areas and from freezing Palestinian assets at will. The international community should also provide greater support and assistance for the Palestinian people. In this connection, developed countries should undertake additional obligations and honour at an early date the commitments already entered into so as to facilitate an early economic recovery and development in the areas of Palestinian self-rule.

In recent years, the United Nations has played an increasingly important role in resolving regional conflicts and in the maintenance of international peace, and it has made contributions to the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the question of the Middle East as a whole. Since the beginning of this year, the General Assembly has convened its tenth emergency special session and two resumed sessions on the question of Palestine and adopted relevant resolutions; for this we wish to express our appreciation. We hope and believe that the United Nations will play an even greater positive role in advancing the Middle East peace process and ultimately bringing about a comprehensive, fair and reasonable settlement of the question of Palestine and the Middle East question.

The Chinese Government and people are very much concerned about the developments in the Middle East region. We have consistently supported the just cause of the Palestinian people and contributed to promoting the Middle East peace process. We are of the view that peace and stability in the Middle East region accord with the fundamental interests of the peoples in the region and contribute to peace and development in the world as a whole. We will, as always, work untiringly with the international community for peace and stability in the region. China has already provided, and will continue to

provide, assistance, to extent of its ability, to the Palestinian people through various channels and contribute its share to the economic development of the areas of Palestinian self-rule.

Mr. Gold (Israel): In the last four years, the people of Israel have witnessed two contrasting realities in their pursuit of peace with the Palestinians. True, there were a stunning series of diplomatic breakthroughs between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), followed by a peace treaty with Jordan and a web of new relationships with a half-dozen Arab States. Israelis were filled with hope that at long last their state of siege had ended and that they could look forward to an era of normalcy and safety.

But the people of Israel witnessed another reality as well. From the 1993 signing of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO until the May 1996 election of the current Israeli Government, nearly 250 Israelis died in an unprecedented wave of Palestinian terrorism aimed at the heart of Israel's cities and in their vicinity: in Afula, Hadera, Beit-Lid, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Indeed, more Israelis died in these three years from such attacks than in the previous decade. During 1997, while the frequency of these attacks was reduced, the bombings continued nonetheless in the Mahane Yehuda market and the Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall in Jerusalem.

Israel had known terrorism before, but these cases reflected a completely different situation. These were not occasional knifings or individual drive-by shootings, but highly lethal suicide bombings backed by a vast and expanding organizational infrastructure. It recruited and trained personnel, manufactured and stockpiled weapons materials, and commanded and financed elaborate operations. Military-grade explosives, which had not been used in such attacks in more than 10 years, were suddenly available in large quantities, with devastating results. But whether belonging to the Izz el-Deen al-Qassam units of the Hamas or to the Islamic Jihad, this organizational infrastructure was growing in the very same territories that had been given over to the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority of Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Today there is a common misconception that the peace process was in an idyllic state until last year and has only just lately deteriorated. This is completely false. It is as false on the Palestinian negotiating track as it is on the Syrian track, where Israel went through two mini-wars in Lebanon and absorbed more than 200 Katyusha rocket strikes from Syrian-controlled territory in Lebanon. The fact is that the present Israeli Government inherited a peace process that was in a shambles because the core bargain of the Oslo agreements had been repeatedly violated: that Israel would address Palestinian aspirations by creating areas of Palestinian self-government and that the Palestinian Authority would assume responsibility for security in those very same areas. This bargain has not been kept. As a result, innocent Israelis have paid for this with their lives in brutal suicide bombing after suicide bombing in the heart of our cities.

The Government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had many options by which to contend with this mounting terror. Israel could have let despair and cynicism overtake diplomacy and could have declared that the peace process had failed. The Israeli Government rejected this option. The Government could have ignored the truth behind these assaults in our cities and blamed only distant adversaries, such as Iran. This would have failed to address the fact that the wave of terror attacks in Israel was emanating from areas under the military control of our negotiating partners. Only by insisting on their accountability could we save the lives of our people. Therefore we chose the option of making an impaired peace process work by adding principles of peacemaking that previously had been lacking.

This September, Israel's Foreign Minister, David Levy, stood before the General Assembly and suggested a code of conduct for strengthening negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. The first principle of the code of conduct would state that violence is totally incompatible with peace and reconciliation. Removing violence from the negotiations means that the Palestinian fight against terrorism would be made constant, and not contingent upon the extent of Israeli concessions, as explicitly demanded by Colonel Jabril Rajub of the Palestinian Authority. Removing violence from negotiations means that Palestinian security services would quell street rioting in Bethlehem and Hebron instead of inciting it. Removing violence means that Chairman Arafat would give no green lights to Hamas to attack Israel, as occurred on 9 March 1997. Removing violence means that the masterminds of the 1996 Dizingoff Centre bombing in Tel Aviv would be prosecuted and imprisoned rather than be set free to organize new cells for attacking Israel, as is occurring today.

To make negotiations work, the code of conduct suggested moreover that the continuity of contacts between Israelis and Palestinians should be protected, and

not be disrupted for short-term gain. Normalization between Israel and the wider region, it was suggested, should not be halted, but should be increased. And our differences should be resolved in bilateral negotiations, not in international forums.

Beyond the code of conduct, Israel has insisted that the Oslo process be based on the principle of reciprocity. On 15 January 1997, at the signing of the Hebron Protocol, both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Chairman Yasser Arafat specifically committed themselves to implement their mutual obligations on the basis of reciprocity in the Note for the Record that was signed by the United States peace coordinator, Ambassador Dennis Ross. To this day, while parts of the international community want to place ever-mounting pressure on Israel to move on with the peace process, not a single Palestinian commitment that appears in that document has been implemented: the revision of the Palestinian Covenant calling for Israel's destruction remains incomplete; illegal firearms have not been collected; the language of incitement continues; not a single terrorist has been extradited; and, most important, the organizational infrastructure of terrorism remains intact within the areas of the Palestinian Authority. And this is only a partial list.

What is Israel supposed to do under such circumstances? Must Israel continue to pull back without getting anything in return? Israel redeployed in Hebron; it freed prisoners; it offered last March a first stage of further redeployment that would have tripled the "A" area of full Palestinian control from 2.8 per cent of the West Bank, which had been turned over by Israel's previous Government, to 10.1 per cent of the West Bank. These are all tangible acts and not just atmospherics or words. Israel is now proposing a second further redeployment; it is only seeking that the infrastructure of terrorism be finally dismantled and that it not just spill over automatically into any new areas that are handed over to Palestinian control. Israel has reengaged in negotiations on the airport, seaport and safe passage; Israel lifted closure, more than doubling the number of Palestinian workers earning their living from the Israeli economy. Israel has complied with its commitments under the Interim Agreement; the Palestinian Authority has not. Where is the reciprocity that was specifically adopted in the Note for the Record and in the United States and European side letters to Israeli and Palestinian leaders?

What stands behind the misconception nonetheless that Israel has not complied? Palestinian spokesmen point to settlement activity, knowing full well that settlement growth is no more a violation of the Oslo agreements than the natural growth of Palestinian towns and villages. Palestinian spokesmen point to our building in Jerusalem, the eternal capital of Israel, knowing that Oslo left Jerusalem under Israeli jurisdiction. Palestinian spokesmen point to our offer of further redeployment as inadequate, yet they know full well that according to Oslo further redeployment is unilaterally decided and executed by Israel. Indeed, in January 1997, in the Note for the Record, Palestinian negotiators such as Mahmoud Abbas — Abu Mazen — and Saeb Erekat termed further redeployment as an issue for implementation by Israel and not as an issue for negotiation between the parties.

Chairman Arafat signed the Oslo II Interim Agreement in Washington on 28 September 1995 knowing full well that his negotiators had failed in their attempts to achieve a one-sided construction freeze on Israel building. Indeed, our late Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, confirmed this fact when he stated one week later, as Oslo II was ratified in the Knesset, that

> "We made a commitment to the Knesset not to uproot any settlement in the framework of the Interim Agreement or to freeze construction and natural growth".

Chairman Arafat signed the Interim Agreement knowing that it left it up to Israel alone to decide the size of a credible further redeployment. What is happening today is that Israel is being asked to make new concessions that go beyond the Oslo agreements in order to win Palestinian compliance with security responsibilities that are within the Oslo agreements. Rather than facing sanction for its adoption of violence, the Palestinian Authority is expecting to be rewarded.

Despite all the difficulties and risks involved, the Government of Israel is determined to make this peace process work. Rather than become mired in the nuances of the Interim Agreement, Israel has recommended that the parties quickly enter and accelerate their negotiations over permanent status. To achieve success in these negotiations, both Israelis and Palestinians will have to adjust their expectations. Israel has begun to adjust its expectations in accordance with Palestinian aspirations; the Palestinians need to adjust their expectations in accordance with Israeli interests and concerns.

For diplomacy must take into account the true context of Israel's situation. Fifty years ago, the General Assembly adopted the majority report of the United

Nations Special Committee on Palestine and adopted a resolution calling for partition and the creation of a Jewish State. Within a half a year, the State of Israel was declared — but it was promptly invaded by the armies of five Arab States that rejected out of hand the General Assembly resolution. From that time onward, no one could talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in isolation from this broader context; Israelis and Palestinians are not located on an island in the Indian Ocean. As a result, any solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must not rob Israel of its capacity for self-defence in the wider Arab-Israeli conflict.

That imperative became clear again when Israel faced a broad coalition of armies that had massed their forces on our armistice lines during the months of May and early June 1967. In the Six Day War that ensued, Israel came into control of the West Bank and became determined never to return to the vulnerable 1967 lines that had invited aggression. Security Council resolution 242 (1967) recognized that need in its call for "secure and recognized boundaries" and its rejection of full Israeli withdrawal from all the new territories that were placed under Israeli administration.

Israel's quest for secure borders against potential adversarial coalitions remains a vital necessity. New factors in military strategy have not altered these considerations. The 1991 Gulf War demonstrated that wars in the Middle East are not decided by ballistic missile barrages, but by the movement of conventional land armies. In any case, Middle East defence resources in the 1990s are still being poured into ground force modernization, into armour and self-propelled artillery. Increasingly, the slow-moving infantry formations of 30 years ago have been replaced throughout the region with rapid armoured and mechanized divisions. This qualitative shift has transpired not only in Syria but also in Iraq, which historically has dispatched large expeditionary forces against Israel, in 1948, in 1967 and again in 1973. Indeed, the combined divisional strength poised to Israel's east rivals the power once aimed at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization by the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe at the height of the cold war.

The West Bank has served as a formidable barrier protecting Israel's densely populated coastal plane from conventional military attack. Its 3,000-foot north-south hill ridge is set against an area that is 1,200 feet below sea level, thereby creating a 4,200-foot incline for any attacking army. Israeli deployments along its sparsely populated eastern slopes, and the routes of access for their reinforcement, have become the front line of Israel's defence in the east. And given the three-minute flight time from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea for combat aircraft, the West Bank's airspace and hilltops remain critical components of Israel's air defence. These considerations of topography, space and time become all the more important with the asymmetry between Israel's own small standing army, which requires reserve reinforcement, and the huge standing armies that are arrayed to its east.

Addressing Palestinian claims can help modify the intentions of some of the Arab States to Israel's east. But no stable arrangement can be structured in the long term if it addresses intentions alone, without taking into account these regional military capabilities. It is possible to reach a permanent status solution between Israel and the Palestinians that fully takes into account Israel's vital needs for its self-defence. This will require both flexibility and creativity; it will also require new political thinking. Israel and the Palestinians must find a third way between unbridled Palestinian self-determination and the past record of Israeli military control.

Across the world today — from Ireland to Bosnia, from Afghanistan to Angola — the State system is threatened by dozens of ethno-religious conflicts. Should the principle of unbridled self-determination be applied in every case, the world we know of approximately 185 States will quickly turn into a world of 300 States, in which every tribe and linguistic group seeks independence. This development will not only lead to increasing instability in the Middle East, it will also become the main cause of strategic instability across the entire globe.

Forty years after the demise of the European colonial empires, it is imperative that the world find a balance between the free expression of peoples' national aspirations and the requirements of international security in the twenty-first century. For the world has moved from an era in which decolonization was the primary international concern to an era having to contend with global "Lebanonization".

The "question of Palestine", as it is called in the United Nations, today has implications that go well beyond the Middle East. In each of the difficult post-cold-war conflicts today, common features arise: illegal arms have not been confiscated, radio transmitters incite peoples to violence and direct and proxy terrorism is still a chosen instrument for winning political advantage. If these acts are not stopped by the Palestinian Authority in

our conflict, other regions will learn this lesson. If the systematic use of violence by the Palestinian Authority is rewarded with increased pressures for new Israeli concessions, then violence will come to undermine every process of reconciliation between peoples worldwide.

At the same time, a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that addresses both Palestinian aspirations and Israeli needs can serve as a model for the entire world. Despite the disappointment that has grown in Israel in recent years, the hand of peace of all Israelis is extended to our Palestinian partners. The best way to surmount the present environment is for both parties to renew their dedication to resolve all outstanding differences peacefully, in direct, face-to-face negotiations. It is time to begin immediate negotiations on a permanent settlement. United Nations resolutions today that prejudge the outcome of these negotiations do not advance the parties one inch towards reaching peace. Such resolutions simply damage the peace process.

I call on the Member States of the United Nations, particularly Israel's old friends in Africa, Asia and South America, to encourage direct negotiations and to free themselves from mandatory bloc voting. The challenge between Israel and the Palestinians is great, but both peoples are capable of achieving the common purpose that was set out by our leaders four years ago.

Ms. Eshmambetova (Kyrgyzstan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Marzuki (Malaysia): My delegation is seriously concerned about the current status of negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which, having started off well following the signing of the Oslo accords, have since encountered a series of serious setbacks. Quite clearly, the disappointing lack of progress in these talks stems from the extreme, hard-line position adopted by the Netanyahu Government. Unilateral decisions and actions taken by the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, are a clear manifestation of this hard-line approach and its lack of commitment to the full implementation of agreements signed with the Palestinians. This has resulted in the deterioration of the security situation in the area and placed the peace process in serious jeopardy.

Despite repeated calls by the international community to desist from its uncompromising policies, the Israeli Government continues to pursue these policies in violation of the Israeli-Palestinian accords. These policies include attempts to alter the status and demographic composition of Jerusalem, the confiscation of Palestinian lands and the demolition of Arab houses, as well as the continued delay in fully implementing the provisions of the Interim Agreement. Under the present Israeli Government there has been an unprecedented increase in settlement activities throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Since it assumed power in June 1996 the Government has authorized and encouraged the construction of some 19,000 housing units in existing Jewish settlements, as well as new settlements such as in Jebel Abu Ghneim, completely oblivious to international condemnation and in clear violation of the provisions of the Interim Agreement. What is clear is that this settlement policy is the culmination of an overall grand strategy which since 1967 has led to the confiscation of at least 70 per cent of the Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the construction of 38,500 housing units for the Israelis at the expense of the Palestinians. Indeed, as many as 2,300 houses belonging to the Palestinians have been demolished since 1967, and from January to early September 1997 alone, 100 Palestinian houses have been razed to the ground.

It is transparent that the policies being pursued by the Israeli Government with regard to the Arab residents in Jerusalem, including the demolition of their houses to make way for Jewish settlements, confiscation of their identity cards and other forms of harassment, as documented in document A/52/35, are motivated by the Israeli Government's agenda to change the demographic character of the city, designed to pre-empt the outcome of the permanent status talks on Jerusalem. While the furtherance of this policy is in clear violation of the Interim Agreement of 1993, it also contravenes Security Council resolutions 446 (1979) and 465 (1980), and in particular the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. These violations of international law compelled the General Assembly to convene the tenth emergency special session in April 1997, and to resume it twice, in July and October. Resolutions of that session have, *inter alia*, recommended that the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention convene a conference on measures to enforce the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and to ensure respect for the Convention, in accordance with common article 1.

The continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian Arab lands has seriously impacted on the Palestinian economy in the occupied territories. It has led to extreme hardship on the part of the Palestinian people as a whole, whose

freedom of movement has been severely restricted pursuant to Israel's policy of closure in many parts of the occupied territories. This has resulted in further deterioration of the Palestinian economy, characterized by continuing high unemployment and a significant decrease in real wages. In the Gaza Strip the unemployment rate is estimated at a depressing 50 to 60 per cent. In the last four years the annual income of Palestinians has dropped sharply, from $1,800 to $950 in the West Bank and from $1,200 to $600 in the Gaza Strip, forcing an increasing number of Palestinians to live in miserable slums amidst deplorable social, living and health conditions. The appalling situation which Palestinians in the occupied territories find themselves in are further aggravated by a rapidly deteriorating infrastructure, such as damaged roads, lack of clean water, inadequate housing and poor health services.

Given the plight of the Palestinian people under occupation, it remains the responsibility of the United Nations to provide much needed economic, social and other assistance pending the resolution of the question of Palestine. In this connection, my delegation wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the various United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for their admirable role and untiring involvement in alleviating the hardships faced by the Palestinians. UNRWA plays a leading role, especially in the fields of education, health, relief and social services, and its programmes are without doubt among the most laudable of the United Nations. My delegation is, however, concerned that UNWRA's budget shortfalls will seriously affect its activities. It is therefore critical for the international community to continue to provide adequate and predictable financing to UNRWA. For its part, Malaysia will continue to make its modest contribution beyond and above its bilateral assistance to Palestine, consistent with its continuing support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just struggle for a homeland of their own.

Until the final settlement of the Israeli-Palestine issue, it is incumbent upon Israel, as a Member of this Organization, to abide by all relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). At the same time, Israel must faithfully commit itself to implementing the provisions of all agreements reached with the Palestinians in good faith and without delay. It must make every effort to refrain from taking actions which will undermine further the fragile framework of negotiations which has been put in place following the Oslo accords.

Unless and until a comprehensive, just and lasting peace is achieved, the international community cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the Middle East conflict, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Indeed, the international community must redouble its efforts to ensure Israel's full compliance with its international obligations.

Mr. Allagany (Saudi Arabia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At the outset I should like to express our thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his efforts in connection with the peace process in the Middle East. I should also like to express our gratitude to Ambassador Ibra Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the other members of the Committee, for the report submitted to the General Assembly at this session.

Since the convening of the emergency Arab summit meeting in Cairo in June last year, and the crucial decisions adopted there, a spirit of optimism and determination had prevailed throughout the Arab homeland for pursuing the peace process on the basis of firm and serious foundations which would enable us to address the present grave challenges. The decisions adopted by the Arab summit came in response to the sensitive phase of the peace process. At the Cairo summit, the Arab leaders committed themselves at the Cairo summit to achieve a just and comprehensive peace as an irreversible strategic objective and option, to be pursued within the framework of international legality.

Despite this Arab position, a position which bolsters the principles of the peace process, the Israeli Government has ignored legitimate Arab rights and all the accords previously reached and has totally reneged on its obligations. Furthermore, the Israeli Government has adopted a policy of intensified suppression and oppression of the Palestinian people, the consolidation of its occupation of Arab territories occupied since 1967, and the pursuit of a practice of fait accompli.

The Committee, in its report contained in document A/52/35, expressed its increasing concern over the deterioration of the situation and the intensification of violence and tension in the occupied territories. The Committee also expressed its concern that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations faced serious setbacks owing to the position of the Government of Israel on the various aspects of the peace process. In this context, the Committee also expressed its deep concern for the lack

of respect by the Israeli side for the agreements already signed with the Palestinian counterparts.

The Arab States consider that Israel is responsible for impeding progress in the peace process and perhaps collapsing it entirely.

Here we have the international community, through the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, attributing responsibility for this setback to the Israeli authorities. The Committee calls on Israel to return to the peace process and to submit to the will of the international community.

Israel's answer to the Arab States and the international community is to continue building more new settlements and to expand the existing ones, in both its declarations and its deeds.

Thus statements made by representatives of various Israeli Government agencies and what we have heard in the Israeli Knesset demonstrate that there is a relentless effort being made to preserve the presence of Jewish colonialist settlers and to reinforce that presence in the West Bank, including Arab East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Work is under way to construct a new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim in Jerusalem (Al-Quds Al-Sharif) despite the demands of the international community that Israel stop this construction. These calls were made at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, convened this year under the "Uniting for Peace" resolution, on the three occasions that it met.

The Israeli Ministry of Industry and Trade approved a $30 million programme to encourage investment in a number of settlements, including four in the West Bank and one in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli Ministry of Defence approved a plan for the construction of 1,550 housing units in the settlement of Givat Zeev, north of Jerusalem. The Knesset Finance Committee approved a special allocation of $16 million for the reinforcement of settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Furthermore, the Israeli Ministry of the Treasury announced last May the allocation of $16.5 million for further development of Jewish settlements as part of the Israeli Government's decision to establish a special development centre for the settlements.

The Israeli authorities continue to pursue a policy of collective punishment in its various forms, from demolition of houses to mass expulsions and the imposition of a total blockade of the Palestinian territories.

From September 1993 — the signing of the peace accord — until now, the Israelis have demolished 270 houses in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Among these, there were 22 houses which were demolished during the time of the Labour Government. Since the Netanyahu Government took office, that is, from 29 May 1996 and up to 29 May 1997, 180 houses were demolished, and some 500 more houses are targeted for demolition in the near future. That is because the Israeli authorities demolish the houses of persons thought to have committed, or who are suspected of committing, what Israel calls security offenses — merely on suspicion — as can be seen from the international reports submitted to us.

The estimates provided to us by the United Nations indicate that the Palestinian gross national product in the occupied territories declined by 20 per cent between 1993 and the end of 1996, even though the World Bank expected that the Palestinian economy would grow by 4 per cent after the Oslo accords. Those estimates indicate that the rate of unemployment ranges between 40 and 45 per cent in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The total loss suffered by the Palestinian economy during the period 1992 to 1996 amounted to $6 billion — all as a result of the continuing Israeli practices in regard to the strangulation of the Palestinian people, the imposition of the blockade, and the closure of Palestinian territories.

The report submitted to us in document A/52/35 states that Israel continued arbitrarily to impose closure in response to its alleged security needs and that the harsh retaliatory measures on the part of the Israeli Government would dangerously exacerbate the state of the Palestinian economy, resulting in greater hardship and despair among the Palestinian population.

The Israeli authorities pursue an arbitrary colonialist hegemonic policy in East Jerusalem, likened in the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories submitted to the General Assembly, contained in document A/52/131/Add.2, to a policy of "ethnic cleansing". Here I would like to quote from the report:

> "The gravity of the situation in East Jerusalem is compounded further by the recent withdrawal on a massive scale of identity cards of Palestinian

> Jerusalemites. Witnesses who testified before the Special Committee have described this policy as amounting to a silent deportation or even ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem's Arab population, who are being treated as resident aliens. It is estimated that some 60,000 to 80,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites, who have to prove that the City is their 'centre of their life', are threatened with losing their residency rights, which has given rise to a pervasive feeling of insecurity among the population. This discriminatory policy, applied to the Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem ... has, among other things, serious repercussions for health insurance, education, housing and freedom of movement. None of these apply to Israelis." (A/52/131/Add.2, p. 5)

Moreover, Israel's policies regarding Jerusalem resulted in violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers, especially in the wake of the opening by Israel on 24 September 1996 of the so-called Western Wall Tunnel under the compound of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the first kiblah and the third holiest mosque in the Islamic world.

The international community should stand up to this Israeli challenge and intransigence, which are undermining the peace process in the Middle East. Arab acceptance of the principles of the peace process, anchored on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 425 (1978), and on the principle of land for peace, in no way implies acceptance of the current Israeli practice of Judaizing occupied Arab territory by building new settlements and expanding the existing ones, or of the attempts to Judaize the holy Arab city of Jerusalem and to obliterate its Arab and Islamic physical character through a fait accompli policy.

The States which signed the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 are called upon to put pressure on Israel to implement the provisions of that Convention within the occupied Arab territories, including Holy Jerusalem.

The Government of Saudi Arabia, which is the custodian of the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina, has accorded special, primordial importance to the peace process in the Middle East since its inception in Madrid, and throughout, until it reached the current crossroads. The Government of Saudi Arabia has provided all forms of assistance to the Palestinian people in order to alleviate their sufferings and help them fulfil their national aspirations in building their independent State on their national Palestinian soil. Along with Arab sister States, the Government of Saudi Arabia will continue to make its maximum efforts for the resumption of the peace process on all tracks, so that a just and lasting peace can be achieved in the Middle East, and so that the region may again enjoy the blessings bestowed upon it by God, the Almighty.

The international community, especially the two sponsors of the peace process in the Middle East, namely, the United States of America and the Russian Federation, as well as the European Union, is called upon to bring pressure to bear on the Israeli authorities to make them comply with the resolutions of international legality with regard to the question of Palestine and the Middle East peace process.

We maintain that the expeditious resumption of the peace process on all tracks through the effective implementation of the Oslo accords, especially the 34 accords signed by the Israeli and Palestinian sides, as well as the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace through full Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied since 1967, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), are the viable road to ensuring the return of security to the region and its emergence from this state of freeze, tension and violence in order for the Middle East region to continue its rich contribution to the construction of world civilization.

I wish to close my remarks today by quoting from the Holy Koran:

> "On that account: We ordained
> For the Children of Israel
> That if any one slew
> A person — unless it be
> For murder for spreading
> Mischief in the land —
> It would be as if
> He slew the whole people:
> And if any one saved a life,
> It would be as if he saved
> The life of the whole people.
> Then although there came
> To them Our Apostles
> With Clear Signs, yet,
> Even after that, many
> Of them continued to commit
> Excesses in the land." [*The Holy Koran, V*]

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The General Assembly is considering this agenda item, "Question of Palestine", in the midst of special international and regional circumstances, characterized by the obvious frustration of the international community in general and the peoples of the Middle East in particular at the very dangerous impasse to which the peace track has come in the recent period.

The reason for this, as is known to all, is primarily the intransigent position adopted by the present Israeli Administration since its assumption of power. Indeed, the present Israeli Administration has endeavoured to undermine the bases of the peace process as a whole. To begin with, it has reneged on the primary principle on which the process, since the 1991 peace conference in Madrid, was based, namely, land for peace. In addition, the Israeli Administration has attempted to go back on its contractual commitments reached with the Palestinian side. Israel's negative position is characterized by a number of arbitrary and oppressive measures, such as its refusal to withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territories, a measure that was clearly stipulated in all the agreements with the Palestinian National Authority. It has returned to a policy of Judaization and settlerism in Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, in total contradiction of the letter and spirit of the resolutions of the international community, particularly those of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

This Israeli political approach is also made clear by the repressive measures taken by this Israeli Administration against the Palestinian people, such as the confiscation of land of Palestinians, the expropriation of their properties by a variety of means, including the use of force and duplicitous methods, forced displacement and the provocation of Palestinians by settlers, which is encouraged. The Israeli Administration is also adopting policies of collective punishment of Palestinian citizens, such as the closing off of Palestinian land and the imposition of economic siege.

As a result of this unacceptable approach, the hopes generated by the peace process have completely come to an end, and the prospects of peace which the peoples of the region and other peace-loving peoples aspired to have vanished. Consequently the climate of doubt even with regard to the feasibility of some of the positive steps that were supposed to accompany the peace process, particularly the regional economic conferences and the multilateral coordination meetings, has prevailed. This is the logic of the saying: "if the root is gone, the branch is no more". The logic of confrontation and violence is overshadowing the whole region, and threatening the peace and stability of all its peoples.

The situation in occupied Palestine would not have reached the present deteriorated stage had the international community been firm and determined in putting an end to Israeli continued violations of the international resolutions with regard to the question of the Middle East in general and Palestine in particular. The inability of the Security Council to adopt a firm position with regard to these problems has led in one way or another to further transgressions by the Israeli Administration in pursuit of its objectionable policies. As a result, the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly was reconvened twice this year, which is clear evidence of the awareness of the international community of the dangers of the situation and of the need to confront the intransigence pursued by the Israeli Administration and to force it to comply with international legality.

This position was also clearly expressed when the General Assembly adopted by overwhelming majority a decision to convene a meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949.

The responsibility of the United Nations towards the Palestinian people will remain as long as that people's case remains without a just and lasting solution that will guarantee their right to establish their own independent State with Holy Jerusalem as its capital. The solution to this problem, by its nature, must be part of a comprehensive and just solution to the Middle East question in its entirety. Any attempt to achieve just peace in the area must include the end of Israeli occupation in all Arab territories, including Holy Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 497 (1981) and 425 (1978). Algeria believes this is the only serious solution possible for the Israeli administration and that it would guarantee the return of Arab territories to their rightful owners, defuse the risk of war in the region and create a climate of confidence conducive to the establishment of a comprehensive, just, comprehensive and lasting peace that would ensure a peaceful life for all peoples of the region.

Mr. Samhan Al-Nuaimi (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, it is my pleasure to express

our gratitude to Ambassador Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the other members of the Committee for their excellent report, which reflects the Committee's untiring efforts to record the destructive effects of the unjust practices and measures of the Israeli occupation on the social, economic and political situation of the Palestinian people and on the peace process in the Middle East, as well as to keep the international community informed of the basic elements of the question of Palestine and its development.

In 1947, at its second session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which divided Palestine into two States, one Arab and one Jewish. That resolution that was the basis of a whole series of important resolutions adopted subsequently over the course of the past 50 years, which were designed to find a solution to the question of Palestine. By way of example, I would like to mention General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948, which dealt with the refugee problem, Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which requested Israel to withdraw its armed forces from occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, and resolution 338 (1973), which called for the parties to the conflict to start negotiations aimed at settling the problem and mobilized the attention of the international community. A number of other resolutions have reaffirmed the Arab character of Al-Quds al-Sharif.

We are constantly concerned by the fact that, notwithstanding all those resolutions, on the basis of which the Madrid Peace Conference was organized and other agreements have been reached between the two parties, Palestinian and Israeli, notwithstanding the tireless efforts of the United Nations and its specialized agencies and those of regional States and bodies to help the Palestinian people attain the enjoyment of their just and inalienable rights, all of those initiatives have come up against Israel's pernicious policies, namely, the expansion of settlements and inhumane repression throughout the occupied Palestinian territories.

Thus, the Palestinians continue to become displaced persons and refugees and to perish by the tens of thousands. In addition, national economic and social infrastructures have been destroyed with unprecedented criminal violations of humanitarian and moral principles and standards.

The disappointing results in the development of the question of Palestine and the complications encountered, which recently culminated in the illegal and illegitimate practices of the Israeli Government, have revealed to the entire world the true intentions of that Government, which strives to perpetuate its presence as occupying Power in the Palestinian and Arab territories by violence, hegemony and the illegal expansion of settlements and to fulfil its aggressive designs at the expense of the rights and the legitimate historical property of the Arab and Palestinian peoples.

Despite the results of the 1991 Madrid Conference, despite the 1993 Declaration of Principles and the other agreements reached between the two parties, Palestinian and Israeli, which represented a vital turning point and a propitious opportunity to arrive at a peaceful, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian problem, and while the majority of the world's countries were rejoicing, the peace process continued to suffer setbacks because of the Israeli Government's systematic and serious violations of the obligations under those arrangements and the other agreements it had entered into under the provisions of international law, the United Nations Charter, the Fourth Geneva Convention and relevant international resolutions.

The entire world has unanimously recognized, on many occasions and in many regional and international bodies, and especially at successive meetings of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, that the Israeli Government's policy of confiscating Palestinian and Arab territories as well as the building of settlements in those territories, in particular in the Holy City Al-Quds, revered by all revealed religions, constitute flagrant violations by Israel of the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territories by force. It is also a matter of vital concern because a close study of the reports and relevant international statistics reveals that the rate and expansion of those settlements and their occupation by Jewish immigrants and settlers has doubled. Further, such practices have become even more arbitrary since the Government began to deal in an irresponsible manner with the Islamic Holy Places by opening a tunnel near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the occupied part of Al-Quds and the unprecedented establishment of a settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim south of Al-Quds as well as in other occupied Arab and Palestinian territories.

In addition, Israel is refusing to grant resident permits to native born citizens and is confiscating their lands and natural resources by means of expulsion, violence and the falsification of Palestinian property documentation in an attempt to alter the legal status and demographic composition of that Arab and Islamic Holy

City and of other occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, imposing a policy of fait accompli that is null and void and is rejected not only by the Palestinian people but by all the world's States and peoples who want to see peace and stability prevail in our Arab region.

For the last two years, the whole world has watched the increasing insecurity and the escalation of tension, violence and mistrust in the Palestinian and Arab occupied territories. Not by chance, these developments have coincided with the intensification of Israeli actions that make crystal clear that Israel is waffling, refusing to respect its obligations and commitments, in particular those involved in furthering the redeployment of its troops from the West Bank, the implementation of its programme for releasing hundreds of Palestinian and Arab detainees and prisoners and the re-opening of the Gaza airport and port. Further, Israel is constantly delaying the final status talks, including in particular the resolution of critical questions regarding Al-Quds, the refugees, settlements and borders.

Justifying its iron-fist policies on false security pretences, Israel is tightening the noose around the occupied territories by surrounding them, by imposing blockades and collective economic and other punishments on the towns and villages and by undertaking campaigns of violence, making arbitrary arrests and assassinating innocent civilians randomly and without justification. These actions comprise a great many flagrant violations of human rights and of Israel's obligations under the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and other instruments of international humanitarian law, and under the Madrid Peace Conference and the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace.

The United Arab Emirates has always condemned all these illegal Israeli actions and their dangerous consequences. These actions have destabilized — indeed, undermined — the very foundations of the peace accords and the confidence-building measures undertaken with the Palestinian side. Therefore, we would like to reaffirm here the need for the international community — as represented by the United Nations, the two co-sponsors of the peace process and the European Union — to redouble its efforts to lead the Israeli Government to comply with the resolutions of international law.

The actions required include, in particular, the calling of an emergency meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to examine Israel's violations of its terms, as well as ways and means of convincing Israel to desist from these violations and to observe in full the just requirements for the comprehensive and final resolution of the Palestinian question. These requirements include the immediate cessation of all illegal settlement activities in Al-Quds and in all the other Arab and Palestinian occupied territories, the dismantling of all the existing settlements, progress in the meeting of Israel's obligations regarding the re-opening of the Gaza port and airport, the implementation of the plan for the redeployment of the Israeli troops from the West Bank and the immediate release of all the detainees. The Palestinian National Authority should also have the opportunity to receive financial support from the international community. It should have the power to build the Palestinian economy unhindered, and its development agencies should be allowed to carry out their work so that they can meet their responsibilities to improve the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people.

Finally, today, when the United Nations is celebrating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the United Arab Emirates would like to renew its support for the Palestinian people and its leaders as they struggle for freedom. We reaffirm that a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question requires the implementation of the essential principles embodied in the resolutions of international legitimacy along with the institution of the confidence-building measures stipulated in the peace accords. Basically, these measures comprise the immediate cessation of illegal settlement building and the dismantling of existing settlements so as to allow the Palestinian people to be free and to enjoy the rights to return to their homes, to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State on their territory with its capital at Al-Quds. And all this should be on the basis of peace, security and sustainable development.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers tomorrow, Tuesday, 2 December 1997, at 3 p.m.

The observer of Palestine has requested to make a statement in reply. I now call on him in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and 43/177 of 15 December 1988.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Today we had the pleasure of listening to the representative of Israel make a statement that contained so many hallucinations that we felt that he was talking about a completely different reality from the one we know, or is living in a different world: a world that has different definitions of right and justice; a world with its own special law which differs from the international law with which we are acquainted; a world in which the concept of equality among nations and peoples does not exist. Perhaps this is the world of God's chosen people. Indeed, it is not our world, the world of the ordinary peoples of Asia, Africa, South America and, perhaps, Europe — East and West.

It is difficult to believe such a level of arrogance, self-aggrandizement and disdain for the realities by which the political discourse of the present Israeli Government is characterized and of which today's statement is an excellent example.

Here, and very briefly, I wish to remind the Israeli representative of a few things in the hope that he might perceive the reality, in however limited a way. The heart of the issue is the occupation — Israel's occupation. The end of this occupation is the prerequisite for peace.

Secondly, any attempt to compare the illegal settlements in the occupied territories to the Palestinian villages and towns is not only a violation of international law, the resolutions of the Security Council and the bases of the peace process, but is in fact racist and vile. It is even more dangerous than that — it is an invitation to the Palestinian side to raise the subject of its rights in Jaffa, Haifa and other Palestinian cities.

Thirdly, talk of Israel's basic and vital needs reminds us of hateful theories that should not be recalled here. Real security can be achieved through a just peace, not through insistence on vital needs, which we entirely reject.

Fourthly, the Israeli side needs to remember that the Palestinian people is proudly equal to the Israeli people and is neither a follower nor an ethnic minority. Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories is not a concession on its part; it is not even a choice. Mutual recognition is not something that was recognized beforehand by our side alone — it is the essence of the Declaration of Principles.

Fifthly, the Israeli representative's attempt to teach Member States how to vote is another example of objectionable arrogance. The time may have come for Israel to understand the meaning of the international unanimity vis-à-vis its illegal policies in the occupied territories.

Finally, we hope that the present Israeli Government will desist from its current approaches and policies and cease fabricating Palestinian violations of agreements in order to justify its own flagrant and continuous transgressions of these agreements. Israel should actually begin to implement the concluded agreements, which will help the peace process to move forward and guarantee the attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.